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From Loyalty to Lust

2 Samuel 11:1-27

The Twelfth Sermon on Second Samuel

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“The thrill of victory...the agony of defeat.” Those of us who remember the late 70s and early 80s can remember hearing those words on ABC’s Wide World of Sports broadcast. “The thrill of victory.” David has just been victorious over the Syrians and now he turns his sights to a final victory over the Ammonites **in the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle** (v. 1). And while **David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel who ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah** their capital city, we read in contrast, **But David remained at Jerusalem** (v. 1). Here comes “the agony of defeat.”

Let me state this in moral terms. In this chapter we go *From Loyalty to Lust*. Chapters 9–10 are the literary foil for chapters 11–12. We go from the loyalty of David in chapter 9 to Mephibosheth and in chapter 10 to the Ammonites to the lust of David in chapter 11. We go from the man of power that blessed faithfully to the man of absolute power that corrupted absolutely. We go from his growing in godliness to his stumbling in wickedness. There’s no other way around it; this is one of the saddest, most revealing chapters in all of Scripture. And because it is, it stands as a warning to us; it stands as a call to self-reflection; it stands as an exhortation to be sober-minded as God’s children. I want you to see this fall of

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David *From Loyalty to Lust* in terms of the three characters David has interaction with:

1. *David and Bathsheba: Adultery*
2. *David and Uriah: False Witness*
3. *David and Joab: Murder*

May the Holy Spirit lead us into the truth of his Word today.

David and Bathsheba: Adultery

First, David's fall *from loyalty to lust* is seen in the interaction between *David and Bathsheba*, which highlights the sin of *adultery*. **It happened, late one afternoon** (v. 2). What happened? **David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king's house**. Big deal, right? I mean, come on, where's the action here?

Pay close attention with me to the rest of verse 2 and verse 3: **He saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful. And David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" So David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her**. Does anything in these words sound familiar to you from another part of your Old Testament? There's a reason why I've described this story as David's "fall" from loyalty to lust. Does that help you in remembering what this story sounds like? This is David's "fall" because in the big picture of the story of the Old Testament

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what happens to David here is described in terms of what happened to Adam and Eve in the Garden: “So when the woman *saw* that the tree was *good* for food...she *took* of its fruit” (Gen. 3:6). And how is David described here? **He saw...the woman was very beautiful** (the Hebrew is “good”)...**and took her.**

That’s the big theological vision of this passage. Practically speaking, this is yet another example of how the devil, the world, and our own sin uses the eyes to stumble us. In contrast to Job, who made a covenant with his eyes that he would not look lustfully upon a woman, in contrast to Jesus who tells us that just looking with lust is adultery, here is David, with his eyes, with no care for Bathsheba, no affection for her, no hint of love; just lust. And like Samuel warned Israel when they craved a king all the way back in 1 Samuel 8, they would get a king who would just “take” because he could. This should be a shock to us, beloved. This is like when we read or hear about a heinous murder and the defendant is asked why he did it, then he says, “It wasn’t because I was abused as a child; it wasn’t because I was seeking revenge; but because I can.” That shocks our sensibilities and makes us all vulnerable.

And this episode ends with a parenthetical statement that Bathsheba was bathing because **she had been purifying herself from her uncleanness** (v. 4). It was that time of the month and the law said she had to undergo a ritual cleansing. The irony is that while she was being cleansed David was being defiled. And the result were those fateful words: **“I am pregnant”** (v. 5).

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David and Uriah: Lying

Children, you may not understand all that's being said here, but one thing you can understand is that a lot of times when you sin, it leads to more sin, doesn't it? You steal a toy that belongs to your brother, then you lie about it to your mom, then you yell, "I hate you" when you get disciplined. Sin is like a snowball that rolls down a snowy hill and gets bigger, and bigger! We see that here with David. His fall *from loyalty to lust* is seen in the interaction between *David and Uriah*, which highlights the sin of *lying*.

"I am pregnant" (v. 5) leads to **"send me Uriah the Hittite"** (v. 6). The gears in David's head begin to turn. You know what that's like, don't you? It's time to cover up your sin! And notice that David asks odd in this situation—don't we all when we are in sin?—as he asks Uriah **how Joab was doing and how the people were doing and how the war was going** (v. 7). What? Why don't you ask your general Joab? Here is also another literary irony. The root for "doing" and "going" in verse 7 is *shalom*, peace. David asks about peace all the while he is plotting chaos! Enough of the chit-chat as David tells Uriah, **"Go down to your house and wash your feet"** (v. 8). That sounds weird to us but it's a euphemism, it's a nice way for a guy to tell another guy, go "see" your wife. Do you see what David's doing? He's lying and deceiving so that he can get Uriah over to Bathsheba so everyone will think she's pregnant with Uriah's baby.

But Uriah can't do this. Not now. After leaving **the king's house** (v. 8) he **slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord** (v. 9).

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Why? Look at Uriah's response: **“The ark and Israel and Judah dwell in booths, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field. Shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife?”** (v. 11) Uriah cannot sleep peacefully in his own bed, in his own house, with his wife, while his brothers in arms are at war, sleeping on the ground, in tents. Now don't forget that Uriah is a Hittite. He's a foreigner to the covenant people, but this foreigner, this outsider is more loyal than the King of the covenant people! And what's David's response? Get him drunk! (vv. 12–13) But not even that gets Uriah into his wife's bed (v. 13).

Do you see what sin does to us, beloved? It's like leaven, that starts as a little ball of dough, that when added to another large ball of dough, begins to permeate the entirety of the dough. It's like the disease gangrene. It starts as an infection in just one part of your finger, then it goes up your hand, past your wrist, up your forearm, and the next thing you know you're being fitted for a robotic arm. Sin is devious! Sin is mischievous!

David and Joab: Murder

And it's not going to stop in this chapter. It only comes to an end in the next chapter. We'll get there next week, Lord willing. For now, notice David's fall *from loyalty to lust* is seen in the interaction between *David and Joab*, which highlights the sin of *murder*. David' playful way with Uriah didn't work so he goes straight to a power play using his general, Joab.

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And look at how foolish, look at how blind sin makes David as he sends Joab a letter from the hand of Uriah (v. 14) that says, “**Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, that he may be struck down, and die**” (v. 15). He’s either so blinded by sin, so drunk on power, or he enjoys the rush of being a sinner, trying to see how far he can go without being caught! Either way, it’s no good for David.

So Joab follows David’s order and **assigned Uriah to the place where he knew there were valiant men** (v. 16), meaning, the best fighters of the Ammonites. Many died; **Uriah the Hittite also died** (v. 17). Joab reports through a messenger what happened in the battle (v. 18), and notice that he frames it in a way that he is not blamed for the loss because of his strategy; this was David’s doing. And if David gets upset because Joab put his men so close to the city’s walls where even women could join the fight and drop millstones on the Israelites’ heads (vv. 19–20), the messenger was to simply say, “**Your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also**” (v. 21).

This is terrible. The king of the Lord’s covenant people; the man who was to meditate on the Law of God day and night; the man after God’s own heart; the man who has shown such evidence of the Holy Spirit’s work in his life commits adultery, which leads to lying, which leads to murder. He’s so far gone into his sin, his conscience is so calloused by his sin, that he tells Joab’s messenger to tell Joab, “**Do not let this matter displease you, for the sword devours now one and now another**” (v. 25). What does that mean? If you’ve ever seen the movie *Rocky*

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IV recall the scene where Drago has knocked out Apollo Creed, and Apollo is on the mat dying. The ring announcer puts a microphone in front of Drago and what does he say? “If he dies, he dies.” He’s collateral damage. David describes Uriah as just collateral damage; of course, the irony is that it’s not of the war, but of David’s sin. David has taken the proverbial forbidden fruit and is now unable to discern good from evil.

“Whew! I’m so glad that’s not me!” Oh, but it is! We sing:

Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love.¹

Here we see our own struggle with sin, even as regenerated children of God. We cry out with Paul in our struggle to do good, but yet we do evil; we cry out when we do evil because we want to do good: “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Rom. 7:24)

Conclusion

And the amazing thing about our God is that he is a covenant-keeping God. He is faithful to his promises. Even when David did what **displeased the Lord** (v. 27), the Lord was able to turn it to the ultimate good of salvation for all of us. Thus we read of that privileged place within Jesus’ genealogy that “the wife of Uriah” had (Matt. 4:6). And because she is there, you can have a place as well! Sinners can be saved; enemies can be friends; orphans can be children. Trust in Jesus. Amen!

¹ From the hymn, “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing.”